

Societal Values, Corruption and Security

Ibrahim Lamorde¹

Executive Chairman
EFCC

DOI: 10.36108/NJSA/3102/11(0110)

Background

It is indeed a rare privilege to be given the opportunity to share my thoughts with erudite scholars and active researchers who have captured for us the essence of life through several years of teaching, research and community service. I received the invitation to deliver this keynote address with nostalgia as it reminded me of those many years ago when I was a Sociology student in ABU, Zaria. In this sense, I accepted this invitation as a home coming of sorts and hopeful that the deliberations that will proceed during and beyond this conference will help frame policy around its theme.

To my mind, this conference could not have come at a better time than now when our country is going through so many transitions at the same time. This is even more so as Nigeria has been described by many scholars as a society characterized by an endemic culture of corruption, threats to Nigeria's security, peace and unity vis-a-vis an extreme sense of intolerance, widespread poverty, starvation, and most recently terrorism and other expressions of intolerance of the differences that make us unique as a people. All of these symptoms require urgent sociological interventions.

I would like to commend the foresight of the organizers of this conference, the Nigerian Anthropological and Sociological Association (NASA), for the choice of this year's theme and topics. The theme of the 2012 National Conference: *Societal Values, Corruption and Security*, is not only apt, relevant and contemporary but also reflects the desire of the association to contribute to the quest for the restoration of sanity in our society. It is therefore appropriate to state that, like most large and complex democracies, the Nigerian state contains a wide range of diverse and sometimes conflicting values, beliefs, arguments and views that require management to prevent total breakdown of law and order.

As career Anthropologists and Sociologists, you have the tedious task of contributing to our ability to understand ourselves, our social world, our problems and dilemmas. The concepts employed by Sociologists and Anthropologists have become part of the intellectual tool kits of contemporary societies and a means of constructing interpretations and explanations of the ongoing social processes of the modern world and for constructing reality.

¹ A keynote address delivered at the 2012 National Conference of the Nigerian Anthropological and Sociological Association held at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, November 5-9, 2012

Conceptual Clarifications and Theoretical Framework

I crave your kind indulgence to provide a few down-to-earth definitions of some of the concepts that make up the thrust of this address namely: society, values, corruption and security.

Society: This can be defined as any group of people living together in organized communities, with laws and traditions controlling the way they behave towards one another.

Values: According to Michael Haralambos, “a value is a belief that something is good and worthwhile. It defines what is worth having and worth striving for.” Values can also be defined as the principles and standards of human interaction within a given group that are regarded by members of that group as being worthy, important, or significant. ‘Societal Values’ form an important part of the culture of a society. Societal values, norms and institutions explain the way in which social processes operate in a given society. They are the social sources of patterned interaction. Simply put, values may be defined as measure of goodness or desirability.

Corruption: Most authors agree that corruption will usually involve some form of abuse of power or office for selfish or non-public gain (Transparency International, 2009). The Oxford English Dictionary & Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary associate corruption with the decay in the morality, not only of those people in public services but also of all those in positions of authority and power, that is , this includes the private sector.

Security: The term security can be defined as the ability to protect lives and property, as well as the capacity to provide food, reduction in the level of poverty, unemployment and risks of all kinds (such as infrastructural decay, accidents, flooding, air mishaps, diseases, etc.).

Theoretical Framework

I have taken the liberty to adopt functionalism as the model to guide this discussion. My choice of this framework is anchored on the fact that functionalism conceptualizes society as a complex whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely values, norms, customs, traditions and institutions. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer, presents these parts of society as “organs” that work towards the proper functioning of the “body” as a whole. In the most basic terms, it simply emphasizes the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom, or practice, its effect on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system.

The above position is substantiated by Parsons when he argued that society is a system made up of different structures *viz*: political, economic,

social/cultural, religious, the psychological and legal structures all playing their roles. Since society is a combination of elements that are interrelated, a problem with one element affects the others whole and in this way, the ability of the system to function effectively.

As it relates to our discussions today, corruption in Nigeria must be understood as a dysfunction that affects the proper functioning of all parts of our society and by extension incapacitates the state's ability to meet certain vital needs of the people. The issue of poor service delivery by government institutions as well as public and private sector corruption, have undermined democratic values and often threatens to destabilize the country. The setting up of anti-corruption institutions, like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), is a response to the need to improve services for the people and ensure that institutional and legal frameworks are not threatened by lack of transparency and accountability in governance.

Societal Values, Corruption and Security: The Linkages

Nigeria is at a critical stage of its development. The country faces severe crises in its economic, social and political development that is not unconnected with the problem of endemic corruption. The manifestations of this crises are clear, the remedies much less so. Thus, in its various forms, corruption could infect and paralyze any procedure, rules, regulations and laws of any system, organization or institution, be it governmental or non-governmental.

Corruption is condemned everywhere in the world because it erodes moral values and if not stopped; it breeds evil such as violence, poverty, disease and other disasters that destroy the society. It has been said that greed, at the heart of corruption, is a great motivator and in the event that the crime of corruption is not punished, perpetrators are willing to sacrifice their moral standards, values and integrity for money. That is why some scholars have argued that a person is worthy to be called a citizen only if he has the basic vision of civic responsibilities.

It is incontestable that values account for the stability or otherwise of the social order in any society. They provide the general guidelines for conduct. In doing so, they facilitate social control. Values are the criteria people use in assessing their daily lives, arranging their priorities, measuring their pleasures and pains, choosing between alternative courses of action. Accordingly, it is clear from the foregoing that values represent a wide range of ideas about the ends that men should pursue in life. The values of a society provide goals for its members to aim for. As a result, values such as respect for human dignity, fundamental human rights, transparency, private property, patriotism, sacrifice, helpfulness, co-operation, individual enterprise, free marital selection, individuality, social equality, privacy, democracy, etc., guide our behaviour in various ways.

Corruption is one of the major causes of poverty and inequality in wealth creation and distribution. It has dire consequences and manifests in dishonest behaviour, corrupting the administration of law and order, squandering of public funds, eliminating the independence of the judicial system, etc. In addition, corruption interrupts human security by limiting access to gainful employment, clean food and water, environmental and energy security, freedom from economic exploitation, protection from arbitrary violence by the police, gangs, or domestic partners, etc.

It is unarguable that there is an intricate link between values, corruption and security in any society. This is because the values a people hold determine the nature and character of their social relationships as well as the manifestation of corrupt or incorruptible tendencies in and out of office and by extension the extent of security or otherwise the people enjoy.

Within the parlance of Mertonian structural sources of deviant behaviour particularly his typology of adaptations, ours can be likened to a society in which there is an apparent dissonance fit between our cultural norms about what constitutes success in life (goals) and the appropriate ways to achieve those goals (means). This is because in the past, whenever anybody is appointed or elected into a position of trust; his kinsmen called him to a corner and admonished him to strive to protect the name of the family by not stealing public funds. Today, the reverse is the case. Whenever people are appointed or elected into positions of public trust, they are called to a meeting where they will be told "This is our chance." They are then encouraged to grab as much as they can.

Basically, corruption occurs within two different social, political and economic milieus. The first is a situation where individuals misuse public office for personal gain. This type of corruption takes place in a modern, rational, Weberian bureaucratic system, where there is a clear division between public and private life. Here, societal values support bureaucratic procedures that emphasize equal treatment based on the unbiased application of laws. In such a system, corruption behaviour violates bureaucratic procedures, laws and larger societal expectations for the appropriate behaviour of its public officials.

In the second situation, the problem is not rogue individuals but a system where corruption is embedded in society. In this situation, corruption is institutionalized and becomes the norm rather than the exception. The extensive literature on 'patronage' and 'big man' politics stands as testimony that, for many observers of Africa, corruption is a core element of the state and society. In patronage systems, while there is a legal fiction of the Weberian bureaucracy, nonetheless norms, expectations and actions of public institutions and their officials are based on differential application of rules, unequal access to services and preferential treatment. In short, the patronage networks to which public officials belong uphold the value of appropriating resources from the state to further the collective interests of the family, clan, ethnic group, region, or religion. The pre-EFCC Nigerian situation approximates the criteria of systemic corruption because corruption was part and parcel of daily life. It

was tolerated, accepted and institutionalized to the extent that both people who give and receive bribes internalized that value.

The reason for calling attention to the distinction between individual and systemic corruption is to highlight the problem of a-priori assumptions that buttress policies designed to reduce corruption. In countries where corruption is systemic, anti-corruption efforts that start from the assumption that corruption is an individual problem will not produce significant results because the actor, values, norms, economic relations and behaviour that uphold the existence of patronage systems will actively seek to undermine reform efforts.

The point to underline here is that if legal and institutional reforms are not applied in tandem with fundamental societal changes that alter power relations and raise civic competence in dealing with corruption, the prospects of making significant inroads into reducing corruption in Nigeria will remain very remote. In other words, effective strategies should primarily address the real sources of corruption, and take into account the possible side effects of such strategies. Where this is not done, anticorruption efforts can bring only limited success, and may even become counterproductive.

It is pertinent to note that there is a connection between societal values, nature and character of the state, corruption and insecurity and a major way to effectively fight corruption is to ensure adherence to 'ethical standards' in decision-making. Armed with ethics and virtue, the nation will then reduce personal gains from corrupt behaviour by instituting "effective sanctions" against such behaviour. To succeed, we must work hard to de-emphasize the culture of materialism in our society.

Why should we fight corruption?

I like to begin this segment of my address by quoting Abdul Kalam who said that: "if a country is to be corruption free and become a nation of beautiful minds, I strongly feel there are three key societal members who can make a difference. They are the father, mother and the teacher." Within the last two decades, in fact in the last 11 years, the development communities have launched extensive reform programmes much of which have made the fight against corruption a policy priority. These reforms are built on the hypothesis that corruption is a dysfunction of public administration that emerges in the presence of monopoly and discretion, which in turn can be curbed by promoting accountability and transparency. Given that corruption undermines policies and programmes that aim to reduce poverty, attacking corrupting is critical to the achievement of our desire to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger as encapsulated in the Millennium Development Goal No. 1. That is why the fight against corruption and other economic crimes must be sustained and accelerated if the country is to catch up with the demands of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

There is no doubt that fighting corruption will help revive and stimulate the Nigerian economy to its full capacity. That is why as a Commission, we have continued to keep our eyes on our mission with a view to ensuring that individuals and organizations no matter how highly placed who violate our laws are investigated and made to face charges in court. At the EFCC we are galvanizing the public as well as professional associations such as NASA to buy into the drive to infuse sanity in our national life because no single agency can do it all alone, or take the credit for doing it.

That is why our approach to the war against corruption is increasingly being viewed with a multi-stakeholder or collective action framework as the pervasive presence of corruption and its permeation of all sectors of society often render unilateral solutions ineffective and unsustainable. We must therefore remain resolute in taking the fight against corruption and other forms of economic and financial crimes to the doorstep of people in and out of public office. Corruption in all its forms remains a cross-cutting challenge of momentous proportions; therefore in order to mount an effective response to the scourge, we need targeted actions that can stimulate lasting behavioural change.

A lot has changed in Nigeria as a result of the work the EFCC, in conjunction with its stakeholders, since its establishment nine years ago. Increasingly, accountability is gaining centre stage in our governance system. Senior government officials are now being called upon to give account to their stewardship of public resources under their watch and many who are found wanting are today facing trial. The same goes for the private sector; Chief Executives of Banks have been investigated, prosecuted and convicted and assets worth billions of naira forfeited. Coming from an environment with pervasive corruption such as ours, it is often easy to conclude that no progress has been made. But that certainly is not the case.

Measuring progress in the early years of the fight against corruption is usually a sticky point. Many people think that success approximates to top officials serving jail terms. That is only an aspect of it. It is much more than that. Some of the worst corruption cases have been (and continue to be) exposed and culprits made to face justice. This is a sign that something positive is being done. That was not the case in the recent past. The underlying point is that each case that has been investigated and is being prosecuted, marks a sign of progress. Since looking back is looking forward, you only need to look back at our situation just 10 years ago to appreciate where we are now. Just look at Nigeria's Corruption Perception Index I have attached as appendix.

Understandably, the public have become sceptical about virtually everything that involves the government, including the work of the EFCC. This is a product of past experiences. Nevertheless, my assurance is that the EFCC is committed and working very hard to achieve its mandate. We are determined to make a difference and change things within the ambit of the law. Upholding the rule of law and accountability cannot be compromised. Justice may be slow but surely it will come. It is no good argument that methods outside the rule of

law be employed to address corruption. While tougher and stringent methods are desirable and being advocated to address what has become a national malaise, the law and instrumentalities of the law alone must be the guiding tool. Only then can the momentum, already generated, be sustained. The state must model the common good it wishes its citizens to follow, not behaviour it condemns.

That is why the National Assembly should enact a whistle blower protection law; as well as fast track the review of our Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act, Anti-Terrorism Act and other legislations that will enable Nigeria imbibe current global trends in legislation as it relates to the extra-territoriality of anti-corruption regimes which favours a more aggressive approach that targets the individuals within corporate entities, their accomplices wherever they are in the world. We also need to re-present the Bill for a Non-Conviction Based Asset Forfeiture law and the Cyber-Security Law as important complimentary instruments in the anti-corruption fight; as well as initiate the process for the establishment of special courts for the expeditious disposal of corruption cases.

Conclusion

Robert F. Kennedy once said “Laws can embody standards; governments can enforce laws but the final task is not a task for government. It is a task for each and every one of us. Every time we turn our heads the other way when we see the law flouted – when we tolerate what we know to be wrong – when we close our eyes and ears to the corrupt because we are too busy, or too frightened – when we fail to speak up and speak out – we strike a blow against freedom and decency and justice.”

That is a powerful observation, because it highlights that fighting corruption is a task not only for government and law enforcement agencies, but for society as a whole – for media, for civil society, for average citizens, for teachers and school children, for public servants, politicians, and businessmen, and for you and me. It is therefore pertinent to emphasize that a nation that is rightly guided by customs, traditions, norms and values of its society treads on the path of zero tolerance for corruption and by implication secures the lives and property of its citizens and those of the future generations.

As I conclude this address, I would like to implore members of NASA to rescue our young men and women who come under your tutelage everyday through conscientious scholarship, reconstruct their mentalities and their sensibilities for the great task of national unity, patriotism, selflessness, honesty, accountability, transparency, hard work, moderation and etiquette. As it relates to anti-corruption campaign, your voices must be heard because it was in matters of this sort that Marcus Garvey once said “for goodness sake, always speak out. Always speak loud enough for others to hear you except you have something to hide. The desire is to be heard, then let them hear you.”

Appendix

Nigeria's Corruption Perception Index

Year	Score	Position
2011	2.4	143/183
2010	2.4	134/178
2009	2.5	130/180
2008	2.7	121/180
2007	2.2	147/180
2006	2.2	142/179
2005	1.9	152/163
2004	1.6	144/145
2003	1.4	132/133
2002	1.6	101/102
2001	1.0	90/91
2000	1.2	90/90
1999	1.6	98/99

Source: Transparency International